SMILES FROM KASHMIR

By the Same Author

WAR WITHOUT VIOLENCE,
1939, *New York.*

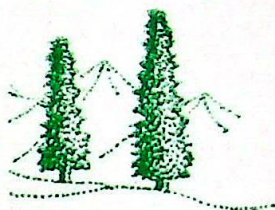
MY INDIA, MY AMERICA,
1941, *New York.*

WARNING TO THE WEST,
1942, *New York.*

THE MAHATMA AND THE WORLD,
1946, *New York.*

THE BIG FOUR OF INDIA,
1951, *New Delhi.*

STORY OF THE INDIAN TELEGRAPH,
1953, *New Delhi.*

THE ADVENTURES OF THE UPSIDE-DOWN TREE,
1957, *Bombay.*

by

Krishnalal Shridharani

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EVOCATION

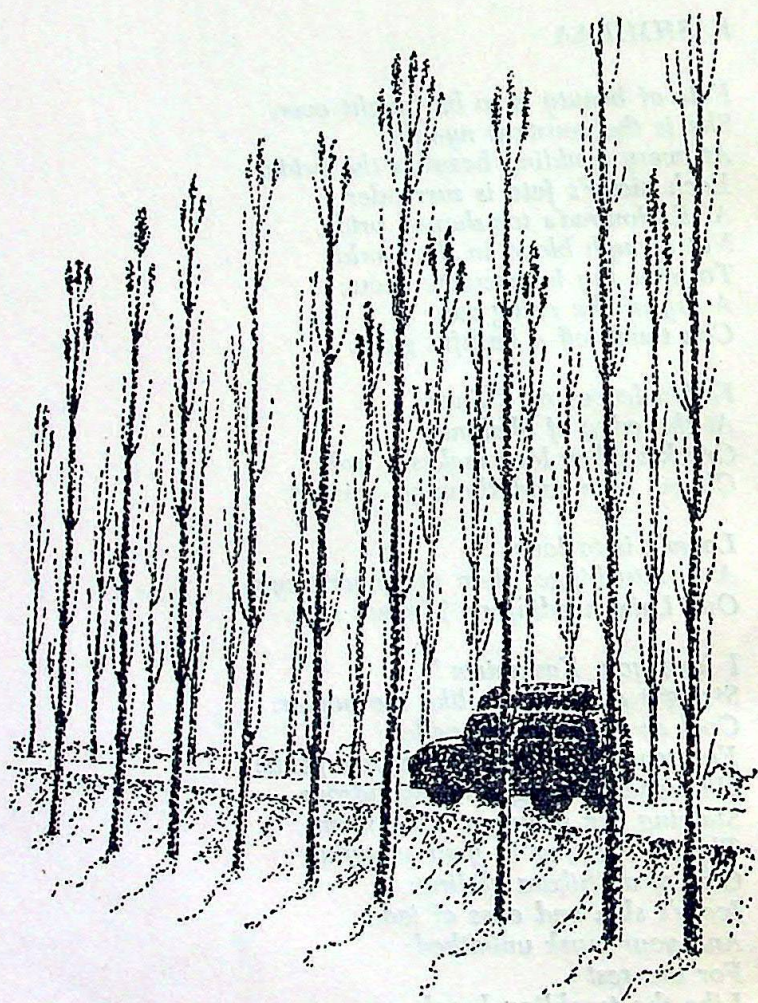
KASHMIRAA

Fate of beauty is to be fought over,
She is the constant nymph,
At every wedding beauty's the bride;
Each victor's fate is surrender
At Kashmiraa's toe-shaped pride.
Not enough blood in the world
To taint thy immaculate snow;
A ray of the rising sun
Can touch off a bashful glow.

Fallen leaves of Chinar
At the edge of Shalimar
Crackle when love makes a bed;
Closed eyes read thoughts unread.

Lover's is to love.
A beauty bigger than the lover's eye,
One Laila needing no Majnu's sigh.

I love you, Kashmirra!
Straight and slender like the poplar:
Cool as full bosom's valley:
Fragrant like Pampur's saffron fields:
Unquenchable tigress polyandrous
Stalking the stones of Dachigam:
There's higgling in your wiggling
Gait of a Shikara gliding:
Ivory's skin and eyes of jade
And your musk unbathed:
For the rest
Like the tumbling brooks, gay:
I like you best
When you smile to slay.

—*Krishnalal Shridharani*

Road to Kashmir

1. PALE HANDS OF SHALIMAR

The second time I visited Kashmir it was all smiles. The snow-capped peaks were smiling in the sun. The myriad brooks were tumbling with laughter. The Dal Lake got pink because the rays of the rising sun were tickling the Chinar trees and those white-waisted, slender, tall maidens of the Poplar tribe. The Shikara-men had the twinkle in their eyes, so characteristic of those good-hearted super-salesmen.

The first time I visited Kashmir it was all tears. It was more than a decade back, in 1947. The raiders were being pushed back and Baramulla was liberated only the day before our arrival. I had flown in from Delhi in Pandit Nehru's party. There was no electricity in Srinagar because the power house was destroyed by the raiders. Even to go to Shalimar Gardens across the Dal Lake was a risk because a ferocious, bearded Afridi face might come out of the shrubs in place of the pale hands.

THEN AND NOW

And then we neared Baramulla. We saw corpses of slain tribesmen still lying by the roadside. There were tears in Pandit Nehru's eyes as he saw the demolition and desolation of a Catholic monastery. Pale girls, trembling, approached Indira Gandhi and showed their torn ear lobes as the raiders had no patience to unhook their gold earrings during the orgy of loot and rape. Empty houses and shops haunted, oppressed one as a deserted village would. I wrote a despatch in which I said that " some day the people of India will raise a monument to the lost virginity of Baramulla ! " Had the raiders not stopped there overnight to plunder and to rape, they would have taken the dusty airstrip of Srinagar before the Indian troops could land the morning after. Kashmir would have been lost.

That was more than a decade back. Now, during my second trip, it was all serene and peaceful. Here was Kashmir without tears. Compared to Srinagar even Delhi appeared an agitated capital. Kashmir was having its biggest tourist season since independence. Yet there was not a single report of theft. Ornaments forgotten by foreigners were being returned by boatsmen. There were gaiety and song in the air. There were smiles on ivory faces. Indeed "There Are Smiles From Indiana," but here were Smiles from Kashmir, the best of the blossoms of the Valley of Gods. Only an outsider like me was aware of the

" normalcy " because to the Kashmiris " normalcy " was a normal thing. I was given a clinching proof of normalcy. I was told that the wives of most of the United Nations Observers were in the family way ; the men seemed to have very little to do at the front.

Thus I have seen Kashmir only twice, once when it was in tears and then again when it was full of smiles. It is a pity that I have been there only twice ; I should have been there two hundred times. There is nothing in the world I would exchange Kashmir for ; it is beauty and elegance incarnate. Kashmir is the most precious part of the Indian landscape. And the Kashmiri Muslim is the most precious aspect of the Indian polity ; he is the sustenance of India's secularism as he is its source. And he is such a smiling man. He is an aspect of Kashmir's lures. Where every prospect pleases the man is smile, too.

VALLEY OF EYES

The poet has sung about the " The Pale Hands of Shalimar ". To the West, therefore, Kashmir has meant pale hands – women of extraordinary clear complexion and dainty, carved-ivory beauty. And yet there is not a single houseboat, or a shikara, or a cocktail lounge named " Pale Hands ". Would it not be thrilling for one European tourist to say to another : " See you at the Pale Hands this evening"? And this is the valley of tourists. Tourists, tourists everywhere. In the season, no

houseboat, no hotel room is available for the love of money. V.I.P.s are dime a dozen. White European and American faces do not stand out, as they do in Madras, amidst the fair faces of the Kashmiris. Thus they are generally more numerous than would appear at first sight. Should not they be provided with a rendezvous place called " Pale Hands "? Every pilgrim has a rendezvous with destiny and every tourist a tryst with adventure.

Holding hands, however, is not a Kashmiri custom, nor an Indian one. One has to, therefore, believe the poet without a personal check-up. But faces are there, smiling and friendly, intelligent too, all around you. And what faces ! Chiselled out of pale marble ! The purest Aryan specimen ! Some sharp, curved Jewish noses too.

Srinagar is a city of faces, all kinds, and it takes all kinds. You see them on the Bund bordering the Jhelum. You see them in the bazaars. You see them in the windows. You see them peeping out of the small square windows of the boats that heave elbow to elbow in the river. You see them as the women bend down from the boat windows to wash utensils in the water that flows only a foot below. You see them in clusters of women surrounded by bigger clusters of children, as they wash clothes on the paved and staircased banks. Yes, Srinagar is a city of faces.

It is something even more precise. Srinagar is the Valley of Eyes ! The most striking feature of

the ivory face of a Kashmiri is his eyes. And here is a valley full of Eyes! Eyes as green as jade or the water of Anantnag (Nag means a brook in Kashmiri). Eyes as gray as the snow over the surrounding mountain peaks at noon. Eyes as blue as the ones that the princess had in the fairy tale you read when you were a dreamy boy. Eyes as black as the hair of a Kathakali dancer from Madras. Here are eyes that speak. They speak out the sophisticated language of the Kashmiri Pandit. But more often, far more often, far far more often, they twinkle with the practical wisdom of the unlettered. Sometimes these eyes of the mountains can be suspicious of the plainsmen, but they show self-confidence too. They have seen things. They are heavy with memories. Srinagar is the Valley of Eyes.

2. A BOUQUET OF ZAFFRAN

Everything auspicious is marked with *Kumkum* in India. Kumkum comes from saffron or zaffran, and saffron comes from Kashmir and Kashmir alone, from the vast plateaux of Pampur (ancient Padampur). One of the names of Kumkum, therefore, is Kashmiraja. Kashmiraja (like Kashmiriana) would thus be a fragrant title for any grab-bag which contains things exclusively Kashmiri and the essentials that annoint Indo-Kashmir relations. Here is my bouquet of zaffran, or Kashmiraja.

SO MUCH BEAUTY !

The late Gopalaswami Ayyangar, once the Diwan of Jammu and Kashmir and then the Indian Representative on the Kashmir Question, is credited with a classic remark. Emerging out the Chashma-Shahi Rest House he looked at the Dal Lake and the majesty of the mountains reflected in it. " We can't trust our neighbour with so much beauty ! " he observed. A pro-Pakistan foreign correspondent told me with a twinkle in his eye : " I think Kashmir should go to Pakistan, but not so long as I am here to enjoy its beauty". Other more valid arguments are indeed there, but how can an Indian think of entrusting any neighbour or a stranger with so much beauty !

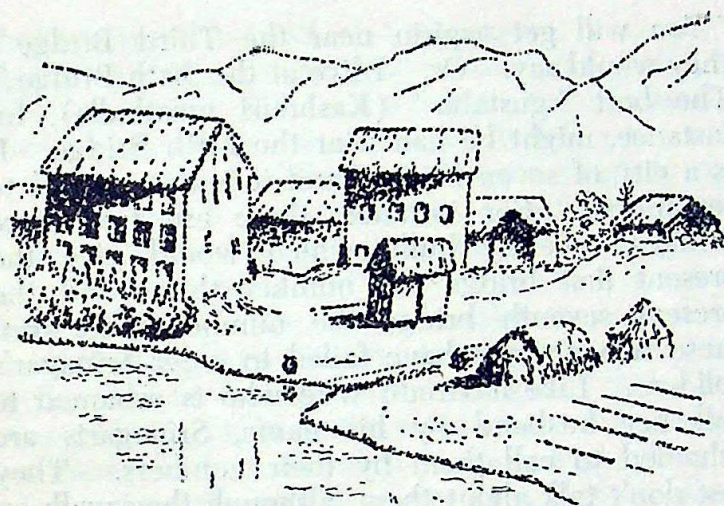
The enchanting vale of Kashmir resembles the snow-white foot-print of Parvati, daughter of the Himalayas, set in an expanse of murky mountains. This heavenly saucer with 52 petals is held by the Himalayas in its lap at an average height of about 6,000 feet above the sea. Around eighty-four miles in length, Kashmir is only twenty to twenty-five miles in breadth. On three sides it is ringed by snow-peaked mountains that cut it off from the world, while on the fourth side rocky barriers sixty miles in width separate it from the Punjab in the south. It is at Baramulla that the fortress is broken a bit to let Jhelum pour the heart of the mountains on the plains. Few people realize it, but Kashmir is further north than Tibet. The mountains in the north rise to a height of 18,000 feet, while on the south they obligingly dip down to 9,000 feet to enable India to hold Kashmir's pale hands over the Banihal Pass.

Larger and far more varied in its offerings than Switzerland, the Vale of Kashmir is an oval palm with fifty-two tapering fingers. One valley is different from another and even the looming mountains look sculptured into the shapes of pyramids and temples. Lakes, myriad murmuring springs, emerald turf, the lattice-work of tall, slender poplars and the haunting grooves of chinars, tall snow-capped mountains led by the Nanga Parbat — make it the playground of the gods. It can't be called a rock-bound prison as the mountains stand there not to keep the Kashmiris in but

to keep undesirable outsiders out. It is a fortress which opens its gates to friends.

At one moment the mountains look like foam-crested waves. But the scenes shift quickly here and at another moment the drooping snow lines look like strips of white confetti being thrown by gods hiding on the other side. Each snow-white mountain peak looks like the face of Radha with a pitcher of milk on her head. The invisible Krishna must be mischievously throwing pebbles and puncturing the pitcher ; for, there are many jets of milk in the form of brooks tumbling down the mountain sides. The sand at the bottom glows like the pulverized resistance of the rocks.

KASHMIRI VILLAGE

We Indians are apt to poetize our villages. Personally I do not see in them much besides dust and fleas and dung. But the Kashmiri hamlet is a different thing. My mental picture of a Vedic Rishi's hermitage would not be much different. Out of the foliage of plane-trees or walnut, apple or apricot trees, peeps the cultivator's cottage. It has a kitchen garden at the back, and a sentry-box like wooden granary in the front. More often than not a clear sparkling stream flows under its upraised porch. On its grass banks do idle in the morning children and ducks and dogs – the dogs of the valley are real " Satyagrahis " because they do not budge an inch from the path of ten-ton lorries. There are streaks of coral red flowers

A Kashmir Village

before battalions of terraces of rootless, tender rice plants. The house-roofs are made of birch bark with earth spread on them, so in time grass grows on them dotted with iris. The cottages are far apart, not like the shoulder-to-shoulder hovels of villages in Uttar Pradesh. In such surroundings the Kashmiri villager lives, never separated from three things — Kangri (a portable stove), tobacco and tea.

CITY'S SEVEN BRIDGES

New York, stretching long along the Hudson, is measured by "up-town" and "down-town". "Meet me down-town for dinner tonight," a New Yorker would say to a friend. Srinagar, snaking long along the Jhelum, is measured by its bridges.

"You will get aspirin near the Third Bridge", they would say. Or, "I live at the Sixth Bridge". The best "gustaba" (Kashmiri meatballs), for instance, might be had near the Fifth Bridge. It is a city of seven bridges and it is determined to remain so. For instance, there are two more bridges, recently built, which would give the present first bridge the number three, and the present seventh bridge the number nine. But these two upstarts have failed to enter Srinagar's folklore. Like a Hindu wife who is ashamed to call her husband by his name, Srinagaris are ashamed to call them by their numbers. They just don't talk about them, although they walk on them.

NOT A SNOWMAN

Eternal snow is all around the valley. The oval bowl is itself full of snow in winter. And yet Yuvraj Karan Singh, Sadar-i-Riyasat, saw the falling snow for the first time in New York, just as the present pen-pusher did. The Administration in the Maharajah's time moved from Srinagar to Jammu, as it does now, before the winter set. Last year the Yuvaraj saw the falling snow-flakes for the first time in his life in the valley, because it came early and surprised the Administration.

THE MOST CERTIFIED MAN

No people on earth are such collectors of certificates and testimonials and chits. You might see

hanging from the wall of a shoemaker a recommendation from Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, all in his handwriting. The massage man has a treasure trove of certificates, and he would tell you one story invariably : "Such and such English or American Sahib had massages in Sweden and Turkey and Russia and everywhere, but he said mine was the best, and he wanted to take me along with him." The Kashmiri salesman is as deft a names-dropper as a society columnist in America. By the time he has sold you more goods than you came to buy, you have the satisfaction of knowing that many and much more important people are going around the world in clothes and shoes that you are just now purchasing. The collection of certificates of a houseboat owner would fill a shelf. And you are enticed into adding your own before you are through. Every Kashmiri seems to be certified. He is the most certified man in the world.

THE QUESTION OF ISA

The characters from *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* have been in the habit of having been everywhere in India. So you see places in Kashmir where they had slept or played or slayed. But the hero of the New Testament also seems to have visited the vale. The tradition is that Jesus Christ was for years in the vale and in Ladakh and that he even went down to Dwarka. Otherwise, the missing seven years of his life (or are they six ?) cannot be explained. The legend tries to be

logical. Anyway, there is an alleged tomb of Christ right in Srinagar. Yuvraj Karan Singh explained, however, that it is the tomb of Kazi Isa ; hence the confusion ; some people have come to believe that it belongs to Isa (Jesus) Masih.

Brimming with legends, the vale has a tradition of recorded history also. Spangler asserts that we Indians have no historical sense. Kashmir seems to have it, anyway, and it might not be surprising if Pandit Nehru's yen for history is due to the fact that he is a Kashmiri Pandit. Kalhana's *Rajtarangini* records Kashmir's history from the earliest time.

WHITE SHAHTUSH

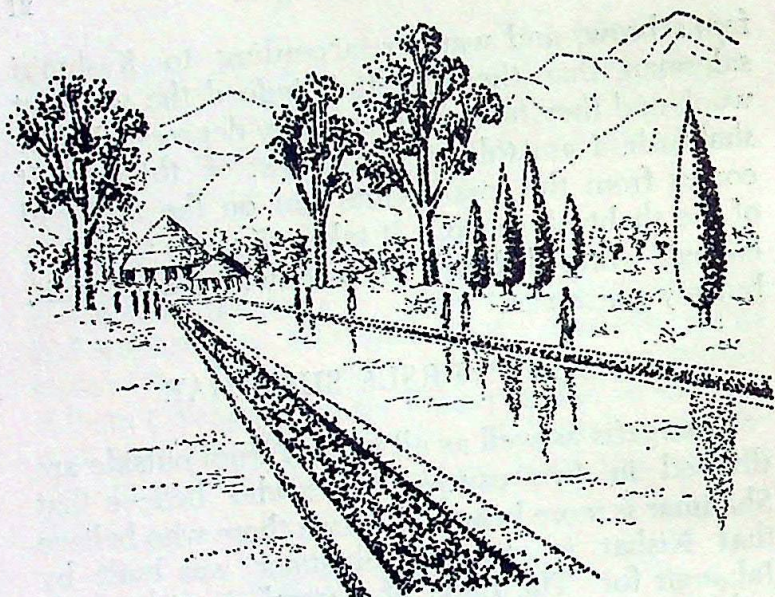
I had read and written poems about Chukor without having ever seen one, just as Avanindranath Tagore had painted the Taj Mahal without setting eyes on it. The bird to me was a poetic concept rather than a reality, so faithful to his mate and intoxicated only on the wine of moonlight. This bird, known to Europeans as the Greek Partridge, I saw for the first time on the Banihal mountain and near Verinag. An illusion was thus broken by Kashmir, because Chukor looks like a glorified partridge.

But another illusion was built by Kashmir. It is about shahtush, the ring shawl, the thing Kashmiri that the Kashmiri Pandit Nehru likes most. It does pass through a ring, is softer than an in-

fant's brow, and warmer, according to Kashmiri salesman, than the sun. It is indeed the warmest wool, and they talk about so many degrees. White shahtush, I am told, is the rarest of things. It comes from the small white star on the forehead of the shahtush sheep. It takes 15 years to collect enough white shahtush for a shawl. I can't wait, but my purse can.

NISHAT VERSUS SHALIMAR

Srinagaris as well as all visitors from outside are divided in two camps: those who believe that Shalimar is more beautiful versus those who believe that Nishat is prettier. Shalimar was built by Jahangir for "The Light of Harem", Nurjahan. It is like a Japanese scroll whose beauty cannot be taken in at one glance, from one spot. It is also a bit gloomy in order to spread the traditional melancholia of the Mughal love lore. Nishat, on the other hand, although larger, can be comprehended, taken in, at one glance, from one spot. The ten terraces and the water falling down them from fountains focus easily.

But, for the glory and magnificent use of natural water streams, there is nothing to beat Achhabal, full of full-blown chinar grooves and water cascades. It is there that you see the remnants of a Mughal hamam (Turkish Bath). Those boys knew how to live! And the girls caught on quickly.

Shalimar Garden

A CALL TO COLOURS

The flowers of Kashmir are a rainbow of colours. The mountain tops become a symphony of hues at dawn and dusk. But the clothes of men and women are drab, jet black and a dirty white. (How is it that desert people, in Rajputana, Saurashtra, Kutch, have more colourful costumes! Perhaps man there tries to make up for nature's monotony!)

It seems to me that cottages and houses can also improve by a dash of colour. Swiss chalets, with their painted windows and walls, add to the natural beauty of the Alps. The costumes of Kashmiris can take something more than colour. The big blown-up gown debars lines and folds that set

woman apart from man. Laurence, the great authority on the vale, calls the Kashmiri gown effeminate and quotes folklore to the effect that it is this portable tent which has made the Kashmiri "goat-hearted". Of course, the Kashmiri regards the gown as a house for his Kangar (" What Laila was on Majnu's bosom, so is the Kangar to a Kashmiri"). And this voluminous gown hides not only the Kangar but many a burn-marks. I was heartened to find in Laurence an observation I had made on my own. The famed Kashmiri beauty and complexion is more to be found in Srinagar than in the countryside.

GILLMARG

Dr. P. S. Gill, whom I knew in America during his and mine student days, a cosmic-rays expert from Aligarh University, has perched himself on the highest point in Gulmarg to look after the Gulmarg Research Observatory. Among other things, he measures the increase in radio-activity due, perhaps, to the Russian nuclear tests in southern Siberia. Perhaps Dr. Homi Bhabha does not pay him enough attention, (scientists being more jealous then women), but he is becoming so well-known in his summer nest that Gulmarg may be renamed Gillmarg.

MAHA-GUJARAT

Of all the provincials of India, it is the Gujaratis, it seems, who frequent Kashmir most. You see

them everywhere, especially in Srinagar and Pahalgam — they do not like Gulmarg so much. Their vegetarian restaurants and hotels are to be found everywhere. There are some houseboats which specialize in vegetarian food simply to attract Gujaratis. There is a hotel named "Girnar" after a famous mountain in Saurashtra which is not known outside Saurashtra. The Nedou's Hotel has become the hotbed of Parsis, a special variety of Gujaratis. If the Kashmir Government is not alerted by the advocates of the Samyukta Maharashtra, Kashmir might become a part of Maha-Gujarat !

3. UP THERE—DOWN BELOW

Most of the Srinagaris and Delhiwallas who affirm that Kashmir's accession is " irrevocable " and that Kashmir is India's, are still parrots. In other words, they utter the phrases but do not know what they mean. It is a big fact, deep fact, that they are alluding to, and it requires deep and big thinking. And because they have not done big and deep thinking, they get into semantic tangles, language troubles. If words merely describe attitudes, then a psychological change is overdue on both sides of the Banihal Pass.

Here is an instance. People still talk of " We in India " and " You in Kashmir ", or *vice versa*. As if Kashmir and India are separate entities! While visiting Bengal, a Madrasi does not say " You in Bengal, and we in India ". It is "Bengal" and the " rest of India ". By the same token, it should be " Here in Kashmir ", and " in the rest of India " or " in other parts of India ". In fact, Kashmir affords another expressional felicity. One can talk about " Up there " and " Down Below ".

But idioms will change only after attitudes change. It is wrong for a man from Delhi or Bombay or Calcutta or Madras to feel like the " representative of the Paramount Power " while in Kashmir, counting his investments, always on the lookout for instances of misuse or even good

use thereof. It is equally wrong for a Kashmiri to feel that he is a " special case ", something different from the average citizen of India. Such postures grow out of an uneasy assumption of separateness.

INDIA BELONGS TO KASHMIR

The remedy lies in the hands of one man and one man alone — Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Bakshi has said that the accession is " irrevocable "; so has the National Conference and the Democratic National Conference and thousands of other Kashmiris. Pandit Pant was the first plainsman to say so, even before Khrushchev broke the international ice and declared that " Kashmir belongs to India ". Krishna Menon has said so, and so have millions of Indians. Even Pandit Nehru has almost said as much.

And yet, something more needs to be said, especially on his part. He must declare, once and for all, in Parliament, that there can be no plebiscite because Kashmir belongs to India. Better still; India belongs to Kashmir. Necessary changes in the Constitution should be made. The subconscious duality can be obliterated only when Nehru the Kashmiri leaves no doubt. I know it will be hard for him to say so because then the Western world would have the clinching argument that he is a politician among world politicians and not a moral leader. But, so what ? It is a small price to pay for the clarity of the national mind.

One recalls Sardar Patel's wise counsel that Kashmir is an internal problem and not an international one; it is wrong to think of New York and London and Bonn and Karachi while saying or doing anything about Kashmir; the right thing for an Indian to do is to think only of Delhi and Calcutta and Bombay and Madras and Srinagar and Jammu and of the thousands of villages of India while saying or doing anything about Kashmir.

The gains would be tremendous. The subconscious separateness will be destroyed. Members of Parliament generally demand that more money should be spent on the North-East Frontier and that greater military force should be required there. Some of them, however, in the privacy of the Central Hall, grumble that crores of rupees are being spent in Kashmir. The entire approach will be changed if Nehru says the needed word. Kashmir would then be regarded, not only verbally as it is now but in the fullness of heart, as the vital frontier of India, and M.P.s would demand that additional crores be spent there. Conversely, some of the Kashmiris will outgrow their subconscious assumption that the rest of India owes them something and that it has to pay a price.

BANIHAL TUNNEL : MAN-MADE JHELUM

The oval valley of Kashmir is drained by the Jhelum and its tributaries, which break through the mountain-ring by a gorge at Baramulla. Thus, naturally, the gifts of Kashmir flowed north-east.

It was inevitable, therefore, for the valley to look north-east, to have a north-east orientation. As the river flowed, so flowed the life of the emerald valley.

But these are the days of man's taming of nature, of correcting nature to serve the will of man. When the partition made two of what was naturally one — an unnatural act — it became inevitable that nature should be further amended to restore the lost geographic logic. Cut off on its north-east by an act of invasion, the valley decided to have a southern outlet, a southern orientation, a southern link.

The answer was the Banihal Tunnel. Indeed it is an engineering feat, but to me it is more; it is a human miracle. The Banihal Tunnel is the Human Jhelum, the Man-Made Jhelum, which gives Kashmir a southern orientation just as the natural Jhelum gave the valley a north-east orientation. If through the gorge at Baramulla the valley looked north-eastward, through the mightier hole in the Banihal the valley looks southward to the plains beyond the Ganges. The Banihal Tunnel is a decisive turn in history. The economy of the valley, paralyzed at the point where Jhelum entered Pakistan, is being revived and bolstered by this new, southward-flowing man-made Jhelum over which the flag of one and only one nation flies. Conversely, it is through this tunnel that the plains below will receive the gifts of the valley-plateau above.

The Banihal, a mountain 9,000 feet high, isolated the vale of Kashmir from the plains of India for centuries. A small tunnel very near the top was thrown open in 1911 (either to celebrate the Delhi Darbar or the birth of this pen-pusher), but it gets blocked with ice for a number of months during the winter. Now here is a low-level tunnel which enables through traffic all the year around between Kashmir and the rest of India. Through it flows trade and cultural contacts and human relations. By it is broken the insularity of the valley-mentality and the remoteness of Indian consciousness.

The tunnel is 2½ miles long, 22 feet wide. At its southern portal toward Jammu at the Banihal village, it is 73 miles from Srinagar. The northern portal which unfolds the majesty of the valley in a flash to a pilgrim from the south is only 55 miles by road from Srinagar. Some sixteen miles of ascending and dropping, hairpin-curving and mountain-shoulder-sliding distance is saved.

The Banihal Tunnel is constructed at the cost of Rs. 3½ crores. The heroic work was contracted by a combine of two German firms. I met some of the German and Austrian engineers and technicians who live in make-shift cottages and tents through winter snow and summer heat surrounded by almost primitive, frontier conditions. There are no cinemas to divert them, let alone night-clubs. Only one German engineer has brought his wife along. Their only relaxation is a fortnightly visit

to Srinagar where they dine, wine and sing to amuse themselves. I talked to a young Austrian, and asked him what prompted him to take up this dangerous assignment so far away from his home. He said that the pay he was getting was only slightly higher than what he got at home, but that he "wanted to see India and the Vale of Kashmir." Meanwhile, they are providing the valley-men with an object lesson in how to work hard.

THE GROUCHING

Foreign visitors to Srinagar confide in you that there is an undercurrent of discontent and even smouldering revolt in Kashmir. If you plead your inability to detect it, they taunt you that " Kashmiris became secretive with Indians because of the Police State." Even " natives " allude to hidden dissatisfaction and once in a while you yourself come across evidences thereof.

Grouching is a universal pastime. Americans grouch about Washington bureaucracy; even Russians grouch, I know at first hand, when they feel secure, about their rulers. People in India have now begun to grouch about Nehru, let alone Chief Ministers. It is the privilege of Kashmiris to grouch about the Bakshi regime; did not they grouch about the Sheikh regime once upon a time?

The question is : Is the Kashmiri grouching more serious ? — different ? To some extent it is. The Muslim middle class of Srinagar has developed

the technique into a fine art, and it does not matter to it who the rulers are. Moreover, there are hundreds of foreign monitors with their ears everlastingly to the Kashmir ground, with an *a priori* assumption that there must be discontent. Such a ready and constant audience merely tickles the fabulous salesmanship of the Kashmiris and they fashion their verbal goods to the taste of their customers. An element of the customary Kashmiri higgling enters, I suspect, when visiting plainsmen are also given a taste of their discontent. But it is the international audience, Pakistani boxes especially included, and not the innate nature of Srinagari grouching, which makes the so-called undercurrent so different. Practically everyone in the world grouches, but the Kashmiri is encouraged to do so. What is more, the Kashmiri is expected to do so and the salesman in him would make him the last man to disoblige.

FACE-TO-FACE GROUP

The discontent is there, and it might be slightly more acute than in the rest of India, but to consider it qualitatively different from the all too human grouching anywhere would amount to taking an alarmist view. There are charges of corruption, nepotism, inept administration, etc., and all these drawbacks are there to some extent and they should be fought against and remedied. But we must not lose our perspective. We must realize that the community in the valley is almost a face-to-face group, like the ancient Greek City State or like

the contemporary Holland. Practically everybody can see what his neighbour is doing, and so everything gets exaggerated, vices as well as virtues. Is there more corruption in Kashmir than, say, in the Punjab or in Pakistan, or Rajasthan ? If Kashmiris are to be told to stop being " special ", the plainsmen should stop regarding Kashmiri corruption as anything " special ".

LOYAL OPPOSITION

A debate is raging whether the time is ripe for a democratic opposition in Kashmir. A similar debate bedevils the rest of India, but the desirability of a democratic and strong opposition is by now accepted in India and the differences that remain merely pertain to methods. It is natural for Kashmiri political patterns to be slower in discarding the aspects of a State movement in the interest of party politics. And yet it seems that the time is as ripe there as the golden apple in October in the vale of Kashmir.

The issue of accession can no longer be the dividing line. There are parties which regard the accession to India as irrevocable as the National Conference, and it is from these that the " loyal " democratic opposition will emerge. A danger, however, is pointed out even here. If the rival parties make the relative speed of " Indianization " of services and systems in Kashmir the bone of contention, the results would be disastrous politically. Such parties would be Delhi-oriented rather

than valley-oriented. There would be a race to curry favour with Delhi, and the Kashmir Cabinet would be frittering away its time in counteracting the opposition propaganda in Delhi. This tragic development can be prevented by Delhi by cultivating sophistication about men and politics in the valley, and I have reason to believe that such sophistication now exists.

Barring this twin-danger, Kashmir cries out, as the rest of India cries out, for a substantial democratic opposition. In Kashmir itself the effect would be all the more clinical. People will have different ideologies to look to in place of different countries – India or Pakistan. But the opposition parties should spring from the grass-roots and they should be based on local issues and on differing economic programmes. The picture would become very clear if some affiliations develop between like-minded political parties in Kashmir and in the rest of India. There is no reason why the Communists in Kashmir should not be agitated about Kerala, and the National Conference about the place of Urdu in the Uttar Pradesh. The bickerings of the plains will no doubt penetrate the valley this way, but the political gains will far outweigh this danger.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

The emotional integration of the valley-men and the plainsmen will emerge out of deeds and not words. A good beginning has been made in the

last two years, but much remains to be done on both sides of the Banihal. Here are ten considered proposals :—

1. Construction on a railway link upto Jammu should start without further delay, whether the Security Council frowns or smiles. The valleyman should not feel that he is now further away from Delhi than he was before the partition, when he saw engines steaming upto Jammu. (Eventually it should not be impossible to have a railroad upto Srinagar, modern engineering being what it is.)

2. Personal relationships between the leaders of Kashmir and the leaders of the rest of India should be institutionalized. This can be done at the administrative level.

3. Lincoln Societies should be started " up there ". It was he who taught that the benefits of the union far outweigh the benefits of self-determination. He did not hesitate to fight a civil war to save the union. " Down below " here, Kashmir Committees should be multiplied.

4. Some big production plants in the Union public sector should be located in Kashmir.

5. Some big All-India institutes (such as the Medical Institute) should be located in Kashmir.

6. It is natural for peoples from the plains to wish that all official and professional conferences are held in Srinagar because Kashmir is cool and

beautiful. But more conferences should be held in various parts of the rest of India so that Kashmiris have a chance to see the rest of their country and countrymen. At present, on the Ceasefire Line at Punch, the only type of Indians that the Kashmiris see are the army men and for marriage, etc., they cross the line to mingle with the Pakistanis. Muslims of the valley should be encouraged, therefore, to go down and strike relationships with the Muslims of the plains. There is a programme of sending hundreds of Kashmiri students to the rest of India, but this effort should be bolstered manyfold.

7. The partial absorption of Kashmiri officers in Indian Administrative Services has created many heartburns in the valley. The centralization of services should be expanded gradually, Kashmiri officers being posted " down below " and others going "up there".

8. There should be a regional study group in Parliament covering Kashmir, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, and Rajasthan. Kashmir publicity in Delhi should be integrated.

9. A time should come when political parties in Kashmir and the rest of India, with similar ideologies, should merge with each other. This would give Kashmir a voice in the politics of the rest of India, and *vice versa.* But the process should not be speeded up by pressure; it should be allowed a gradual evolution.

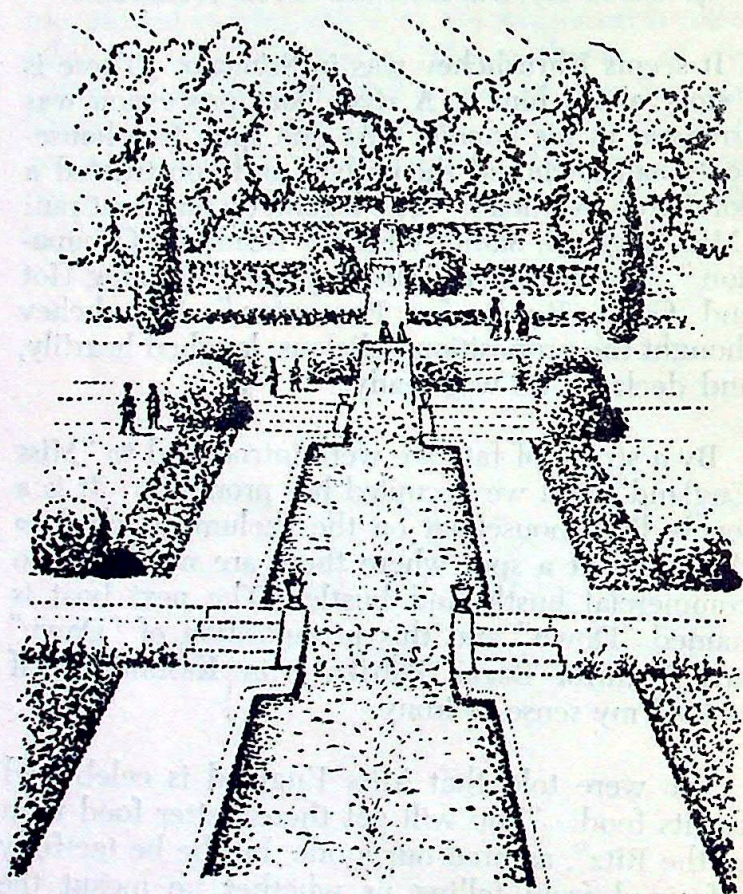
10. By the same token, a time should come when Kashmir discards its "specialnesses" and becomes one State among many. But this process, too, should not be forced as the evolution is inevitable. The extension of the authority of the Union Election Commission and of the Supreme Court should be also effected cautiously as there are some valid local difficulties. In other words, persons in power in Kashmir should be converted to this view rather than pressured.

4. MISS ENGLAND OF THE JHELUM

It seems Khrushchev was in Srinagar. There is a story about him. A river boat procession was arranged in his honour. At one spot, two house-boats had anchored themselves and constructed a floral arch overhead. The legend on one boat ran: "Miss England: Sanitary Fitted: Ready for Occupation." On the other: "Miss America: Running Hot and Cold: Ready for Possession." Khrushchev thought the proposition delicious, laughed heartily, and declared he was ready..

By a streak of fate we were introduced to "Miss England", and we occupied her promptly. It is a lovely little houseboat on the Jhelum attached to the Bund at a spot where there are no shops, no commercial hustle and bustle. The next boat is named "Down" and this juxtaposition of "Dawn" and "Amrita Bazar Patrika"* in Kashmir itself tickled my sense of irony.

We were told that Miss England is celebrated for its food. "You will get there better food than at the Ritz", assured our guide, but he be tactfully refrained from telling us whether he meant the Ritz at Place Vendome in Paris or the one in New York or the one in Bombay. Anyway, we found

* The newspaper in which all this material appeared first. The publishers are grateful to the Amrit Bazar Patrika for permission for the re-use of the material in this booklet.

Nishat Garden

Miss England an attractive thing because it is built by an English lady from Bombay for personal use and so the furniture is tasteful and not gaudy, and there are side-lights instead of the globes glaring from the ceiling. The food was delectable too.

I think that the Keyhole to Kashmir is the houseboat. No outsider can understand this paradise unless he has one peep through this Keyhole. We Indians are attached to rivers more than to oceans anyway, although we have one of the longest seashores of any country in the world. And we are more attached to the sisters of the Ganga than to the brothers of the Manas lake like the Dal and the Wular. Here on the Jhelum floats the character of Kashmir, the life of Kashmir. You can study them from the deck of your houseboat or from its bay window. You just sit; the panorama passes by you.

"SPECIAL CLASS"

Our Miss England is special class, which means it has flush toilet and a radio; then there are A, B, and C class boats. The Government has fixed the rates so that one would not get cheated. At the same time, the Bombay Bania has lost his chance; if left alone he can haggle the boatman down from the Government rates.

Talking shop about the boat is fashionable among tourists as well as among Srinagaris. You can do so without appearing a piker. The temporary

occupant of one houseboat compares the rates, food, cleanliness, etc., with the temporary occupant of another houseboat. The boatmen themselves take such exchanges between their "masters" in their stride, because they laugh when they are "caught" and fully expect the tourists to laugh; and they do.

Among the special class houseboats, everybody talks about the New York because Barbara Hutton once slept there. I wonder which number of her husbands was with her; she is an anthologist when it comes to husbands. I am told that American envoys prefer "Harmony", which is just as well. Then there is the New Eagle. Scores others. They say that foreign envoys pay through their noses merely for the privilege of pulling the flush chain. But then, this is the propaganda of those boatmen whose boats are not "special" but just plain A,B, and C.

LADY SOFT-BOTTOM

The names of houseboats can be exotic, but not as intriguing as those of the Shikaras; if you liken houseboats to small little hotels, shikaras are the taxis that run between them and around them. There is a houseboat named "Jazz", but it has no orchestra on it. There is a houseboat named Martin, which a German journalist hired because he thought it was named after Martin Luther. There is a houseboat named Peony which is a favourite of Christian missionaries of Indian origin. But, as I said, in names nobody can beat the Shikaras. Let

me skip over the middling things and reach the extreme. There is a Shikara named "Lady Soft-Bottom". But let it be said once and for all that before the Kashmiris themselves began to be imaginative about christening their boats, they had received a great deal of prompting from foreign tourists, especially Americans. It is a wonder that there is no Shikara named the "Cross-eyed Joe!"

HANDWRITINGS ON THE CURTAIN

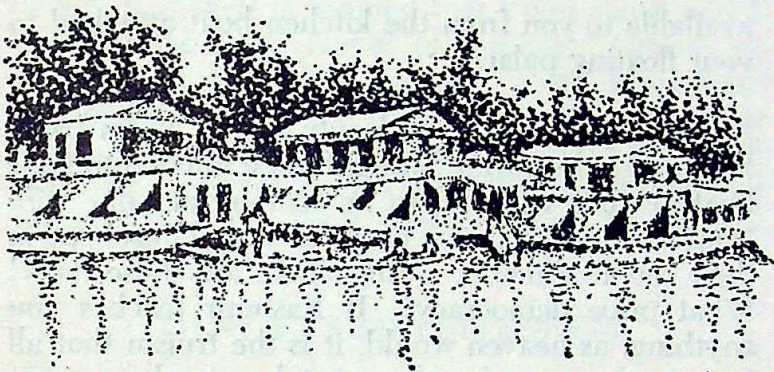
Special Class boats prefer Europeans. They fight shy of Indians although Indians are now independent and no more the "lesser breed" of Kipling; and although, what is more, the owners of houseboats themselves are Indians. But why blame the Kashmiris? The complaints they make would be made by any neat housewife from Bombay or Calcutta or Delhi. They say that most Indians wipe their hands after eating with the window and door curtains, and these boats have nice clean curtains. Having once faced the handwriting on the wall, the Kashmiri boatmen do not want to look at the handwriting on the curtain. Personally, I do not blame them, my patriotic spirit notwithstanding.

Some people say that the Kashmiri houseboat is also a British invention. Other people say that they are copies of boats on the Swiss lakes. But my patriotism says that the houseboat is Kashmir's contribution to world culture, and that it was invented by one Pandit Narayan Das. Now, please,

don't ask me who was he or when did he live. Time and place have no space in a paradise. The houseboats, anyway, are little floating patches of paradise. Anyway, the owning families want to maintain them as such. Upon arrival we were told that ours were the first children allowed to mount Miss England. The theory is that Indian children are undisciplined and that they smear and break things. How true is this in spite of the fact that our children are allowed to live on Miss England! And how proud and happy are we that Indian children are as undisciplined as they are! They will grow up to be normal human beings, even disciplined human beings.

THE RIVER OF LIFE

Life is a river. River is life. Once you board a houseboat, you need not get off for anything. But you must have inner resources—the contemplative capacity, the ability to watch the floating and shifting life, the gladness to go to bed with a book, all curled up. Then you can stay, absolutely stationary, and the whole life, the whole world, will come to your door: Stay on a houseboat!

The sun is out, and you step out of your bedroom and step up the deck and breathe deeply and look the distant snow-capped mountains now touched with pink. You go down and bathe and come up again, this time to the water-landing. A Shikara comes along with a barber on it, and also a massage-man. Either you shoo him off in the interest of Mr. Gillet or you have him for a treat. And the

Houseboats on Jhelum

massage-man can be as good as the one in Sweden without being so expensive. A shikara will float by loaded with vegetables and fruits; another selling flowers. A general merchandise shikara may come to sell you soaps and oils and vitamins and combs.

A local doctor may inquire whether you need him, and if you don't, he will glide by you in his shikara to the next boat and the next and the next. Everything will come to your boat, all floating and gliding in shikaras—the world journies to you while you stay stationary. Even your friends come to visit you aboard shikaras while you keep on perching on your island. Then somebody else comes in a shikara assuring that he is not a salesman but merely wants an interview with you. He is a venerable looking old man and you fall for him. But you have to part with a fiver at least as he turns out to be a donation-man from a local high school. And the wail of the crying child, so rare in Kashmir, is

available to you from the kitchen boat attached to your floating palace.

Once upon a time, and only as few years back, floating gardens were brought to be hitched to your boat at your will and to be sent off at your will. Musicians and dancers came to your houseboat in their own shikaras. Ah, where are those days! What price democracy! If Kashmir teaches you anything, as heaven would, it is the truism that all men are not equal and cannot be equal.

THE LOGBOOK

The river flows onward. If you want to flow backwards, and there is a provision for it, you open the record-book of your houseboat. It would be a mine of information to draw in your memory. And you would realize that it is a small world. I learned from the roster of the boat that my old pal Jaipal Singh had stayed on this boat. My boatman Abdul Samad, a tall and lanky man with the manners of the Mughal courts, with chaste English accent but a limited vocabulary, still remembered him as "Honourable Mr. Jaipal Singh". The legend of the boat has it that Jaipal Sigh brought somebody on the boat who in turn brought Sheikh Abdullah and Bakhashi Ghulam Mohammad and D. P. Dhar on the boat and all of them testified that Miss England cooks excellent dishes.

From the file of testimonials, and collecting testimonials seems to be a favourite sport of

Kashmiris, it appeared that a lady from Indiana, U.S.A. had slept in the bed that I was using, and I recalled the Sand Dunes of Indiana. Officers of the Grindleys Bank, London, I could learn from the roster, must have browsed through the same books that I am now paging through in the small but neat collection on the houseboat. It seems that passengers leave their books behind to build a library for their successors.

MEMORY'S SILVER SCREEN

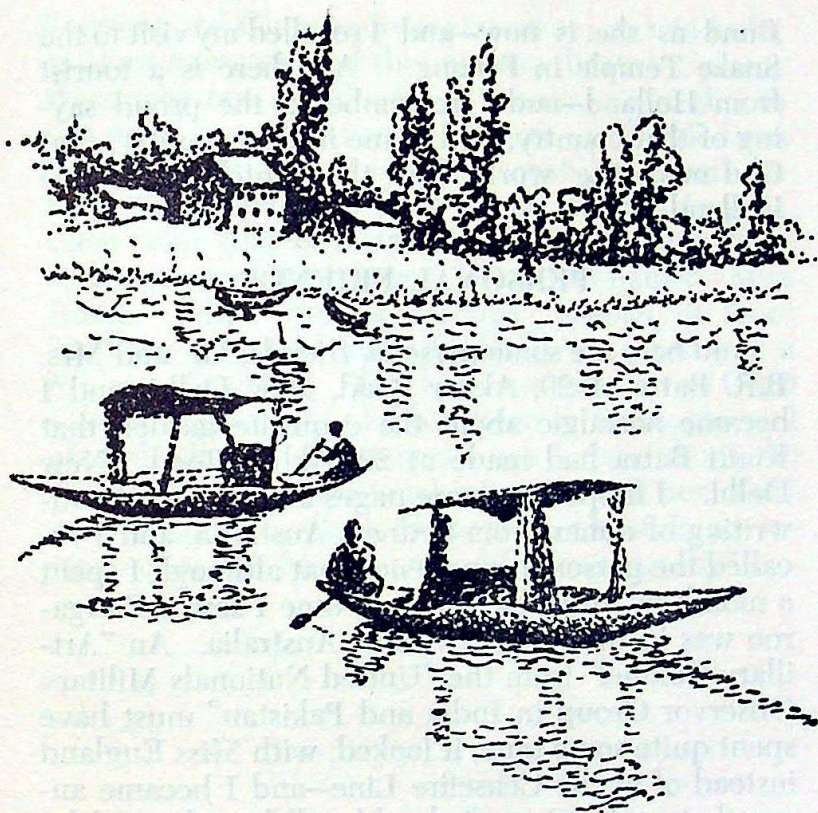
An English couple from Bombay, a German Engineer from Hamburg (and the bright lights of the Ripperban flashed on the screen of my memory), a Burmese businessman from Calcutta, three Japanese tourists (and Fujiyama came into the focus on my mind's screen)—all had affixed their signatures on the boat's logbook. As I thumbed through its pages, my mind became the silver screen on which a private travelogue was being shown—all written and directed and acted by me. There was a Parsi from Bombay, and I thought of the Tower of Silence and the encircling vultures. There was a "Consultant" from UNESCO, and I was reminded of the American Senator who thought UNESCO was a country in Eastern Europe reeling under Russian heels. A couple from Kansas City, U.S.A., had spent, it appeared, a week (a pretty long time for any Americans) on this boat, and I remembered that there are two Kansas City, one in Missouri and the other in Kansas, simply divided by a river. Some Californians had, I could read, "thoroughly

enjoyed" their stay on this boat–and I thought of the Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco and of the famed sea–food served there. Mrs. Henry Goodnow from Delaware has, I could notice, a very neat hand–and I thought of the Chesapeake Bay on which I used to cruise on a similar but low–roofed and engined boat, known there as a cruiser.

WHERE MINISTERS GRAZE

Two Deputy Ministers from Orissa, it appeared, must have looked through the same window as now I am looking through at the floating life on the flowing river–and I wondered whether they had managed to attend an official conference in cool Shrinagar–all found. Next was a professor from London, Ontario, Canada–and I thought of a speech I had delivered there when it still was "a phoney war". On the succeeding page Mrs. Thacker of New York had penned something, and I began to wonder as to what has happened to Professor Boyd Tucker of New York. Next appeared an instructor from Harvard University, and I was reminded of my oft–repeated joke at American Alumni banquets to the effect that Columbia is a better university.

THE HARVARD MAN

The appearance of the Harvard man on Miss England's logbook projected two flash–backs on my memory's screen. It seems that more Americans patronize Miss England than English-

On the Jhelum

men. Moreover, it was evident in the letterhead that the Harvardman was attached to the "Pakistan Project Field Office". It seems that most of the foreigners stationed in Pakistan prefer to spend their holidays in India's Kashmir.

The Senior Assistant Commissioner of the Malayan Police knew Miss England when she was anchored in the Dal Lake instead of at the Jhelum

Bund as she is now—and I recalled my visit to the Snake Temple in Penang. And here is a tourist from Holland—and I remembered the proud saying of that country, told to me in that country, that God made the world but the Dutchman made Holland.

PERSONAL FRIENDS

And here are some personal friends, Mr. and Mrs. B.R. Batra of 29, Akbar Road, New Delhi—and I became nostalgic about the exquisite garden that Kunti Batra had made at 29, Akbar Road, New Delhi. I flipped on more pages and saw the handwriting of a man from Sydney, Australia, and I recalled the personal experience that although I spent a month in Australia, the only time I saw a Kangaroo was in the zoo of Sydney, Australia. An "Artillary Colonel" from the "United Nationals Military Observor Group in India and Pakistan" must have spent quite some time, it looked, with Miss England instead of at the Ceasefire Line—and I became angry that such "Group" should still be tolerated by Delhi. And here is a whole bunch from Park Avenue, New York—and I wish I could meet them and inquire whether slumming in Shrinagar was more interesting than slumming on Park Avenue.

NO "MISS RUSSIA"

Pages after pages are flipping by but not a man or a woman from Russia or China, and I began to wonder why, and it occured to me that perhaps

Russians and Chinese do not travel as much in India as Westerners do and that anyway boatmen prefer those who can spend a lot of money. The clinching proof is on the very next page—a Sheikh from Bahrein where roads are not constructed because they cannot make up their minds whether to pave them with gold or silver. But it would have been really nice had there been a houseboat named "Miss Russia" with "Sputnik Fittings" instead of mere "Sanitary Fittings" aboard which one could mix a Molotov Cocktail. Yet, here is a man from Cape Comorin, it seems, who has been in Shrinagar and aboard Miss England—and I am happy about the prospects of the emotional integration of our country—Kashmir to Cape Comorin. Ah, it is an ex-instance worth having while life flows you by!

5. SOURCE OF SECULARISM

It is said that Jawaharlal Nehru, the most famous Kashmiri Pandit alive today, and perhaps in history, extended his secularism to the habitat of his ancestors and made Kashmir the symbol of India's secularism. I have a topsyturvy story to tell. It is Kashmir that is culturally secular and it is the Kashmiri heritage flowing in his veins that has made Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru the greatest advocate of secularism in our time.

My wonderings in Kashmir made me conscious of how each of the fifty-two vallies is vibrant with memories as ancient as the Vedas. Kashmir is India in a truer sense than any other part of the sub-continent. It is there that the traditions that bind us all today across the frontiers of religions and races began.

Yet it has been a paradox. No other part of India has experienced the intense brutality of religious persecution that Kashmir has. When conversion campaigns were in full swing, they were on mass scales, and it was always a choice between the most tortured death or a new faith. And yet the average Kashmiri has remained a happy blend, a secular human being although faithful to his particular religion. Why? Because, I have learnt, bigotry always came from outside the valley, be it Afghan or Sikh or Hindu or Dogra. The people

of the valley are very pliable and they have always felt like a a one big family—the population is so small that is almost a face-to-face group. What is more, the cruel persecutors from outside, even while successful in mass conversions under duress, merely deepened the conviction of the valleymen that brotherhood is more fundamental than religious labels.

MUSLIM "RISHIS"

There are many evidences of the fluent interplay of cultures and religious beliefs. Quite a few Maulavis, for instance, are vegetarians as their Hindu ancestors must have been. There are more shrines of saints than mosques, and Hindus "belive" in these saints and shrines. Quite often a mosque and a temple are side by side, and two types of worship go on side by side unhindered. There are certain maulavis attached to such shrines, especially at Verinag, who are known as "Rishis"—as Hindu saints were known in the Vedic times.

In this respect Kashmiri Muslims are more like the Muslims of Indonesia than like the Muslims of Indian plains. In either case, conversion to Islam has not meant a repudiation of Hindu heritage in the interest of Arabization or Persianization. Many Muslims have basically Hindu or Sanskrit names, as many Hindus have Persian or Afghan names. You may come across Abdulla Pandit. Both communities intermingle freely at religious and family ceremonies of marriage and death.

The Muslim "Rishis" of Verinag remind me of a story about Indonesia's Dr. Hatta. When he was in Delhi, he was given a Muslim guide who insisted that Dr. Hatta should meet the Maulavi of the Jama Masjid. "What is a Maulavi?" inquired Dr. Hatta innocently. When a description was given, Dr. Hatta, a staunch Muslim, exclaimed: "Oh, you mean a Mahaguru!" That is the spirit of Kashmir also. Social system in Kashmir is delightfully plastic and it cuts across religious bounderies. Conversions have changed religious beliefs but not the basic cultural patterns of the community. (It was while I was in Indonesia in the company of my friend Iravati Latif that I began to wonder why a Hindu woman by the name of Iravati should, upon conversion to Christianity, become Violet, or, upon conversion to Islam, become Fauzia! Such changes denote not merely religious conversions but also cultural transformations; the name 'Violet' is no part of Christianity but it is Western; the name 'Fauzia' stems from Arabic or Persian traditions but not directly from Islam.) Many Kashmiri Muslim boatmen still call themselves Dars.

THE KASHMIRI PANDIT

The Kashmiri Pandit is a rare bird in many respects. As a symbol of secularism he is especially noteworthy. He is as conversant with Persian and Persian culture as he is with Sanskrit and the Hindu classics. He has assumed several names that are of Afghan or Persian or Arabic origin. He has adopted many of the modes of the Mughals,

and yet he represents the pure Aryan type. Although a Brahmin, he is a meat-eater.

Until Shan-i-Hamadan came to Kashmir about the middle of the 14th century, the entire population was Hindu. It is said that the conversion campaign was so intense that at one point only eleven families of Hindus remained in the Valley. Their descendents are known as the Malmas, while the Brahmins who came from the south are known as Banamas. The Hindus who now live in Kashmir are, with few exceptions, all Brahmins and called Pandits. A majority of them live in Shrinagar itself. There are three sub-divisions of these Brahmins—astrologers, priests and the karkuns or the workers. There is only one caste—the Brahmin, but there are several sub-castes.

NICK—NAMES

The Pandits are further sub-divided by numerous *gotras* or clans. Every Pandit is proud of his *gotra*, but to others he is known by his *kram*, or the family appellation. Out of the 120 original gotras there have emerged hundreds of more surnames which in the case of the Kashmiris are no more than nick-names.

The Pandits of Kashmir are very much like the Parsis of Bombay in some respects. Both the Pandit and the Parsi are of fair complexion and of pure Aryan type. Both are good talkers and they have a sense of humour. Both abound in nick-names. A

Parsi dealing in cotton becomes Cottonwalla. One becomes Daruwalla because he deals in toddy. I am told that there is a Parsi family known as Sodawaterbottlecorkopenerwalla. The nick-names of Pandits can be equally light-hearted. Jawaharlal's Kaul ancestors became Nehru because they lived near a nahar or canal. (Had they been Parsis, they would have called themselves "Canalwalla"). Saprus are perhaps originally from Sopur. Kokru means fowl, Bakaya means the revenue defaulter; Khar denotes the iron trade. (Parsi would have called himself Lohawalla or Steelwalla, Gujarati and English both being his mother-tongues). Pandit Sultan perhaps have had close relations with the Muslim Kings. Wattal means scavangers. Callings, functions and geographic locations often originate such surnames.

A man named Wasdev had a mulberry tree growing in his courtyard and so he was called Wasdeva Tul (mulberry). In order to avoid being called Mr. Mulberry (Pandit Tul), he cut down the tree. But the trunk remained, and so he began to be called Mr. Trunk (Pandit Mund). He then dug out the trunk which left a hole in the ground. So he began to be known as Mr. Hole or Pandit Khud. While he filled in the hole, a mound was formed; so he began to be called Mr. Mound alias Pandit Teng. There are many little Mounds or Tengs running around Srinagar since then.

Here is another instance. A Pandit was supplying the famous spinach of Kashmir to a Sultan, so

he began to be called Pandit Hak, or Mr. Spinach. A Pandit whose spinach was worm-laden began to be called Haksar, or Mr. Vegetable-worm. The surname Katju has something to do with grass, may be tall grass.

The Kashmiri Pandits have several affinities with the Nagars of Gujarat. Just as Kashmiri Pandits are Brahmins of Brahmins, so are the Nagars the Brahmins of Brahmins. Nagars, too, are fair of complexion; the Nagarani is as celebrated for her beauty as the Panditani. Nagars provided most of the Diwans to the Native States of Kathiavad and Gujarat as the Pandits did to the Native States of the rest of India.

Most intriguing, the Nagars have even funnier nicknames than the Kashmiri Pandits. A Deputy Minister at the Centre is a Nagar and his name is Mr. Hathi or Mr. Elephant. Once upon a time he used to be the private secretary of Mr. U.N. Dhebar (another Nagar) who was then the Chief Minister of Saurashtra. "Send Hathi immediately," wired Mr. Dhebar from Rajkot to Bhavnagar where Mr. Hathi was visiting. The Bhavnagar Maharajah's elephant plopped forty miles in the direction of Rajkot before it was realized that Hathi the man was meant. I know a Nagar whose name is Mankad or Mr. Bedbug. There is a Nagar whose name is Mankodi or the black–ant. There is a Nagar whose name is Mr. Mosquito. There is one big difference. While the carnivorous Kashmiri Pandits

go more after vegetable names, the vegetarian Gujarati Nagars go more after animal names.

FAMOUS PLAINS—PANDITS

It is natural that Pandit Anand Kaul, writing as far back as 1925 in his book "The Kashmiri Pandit", does not lead off with Jawaharlal Nehru when talking about Kashmiri Pandits who have settled down in the plains and acquired fame and fortune. In his list of luminaries, even the name of Pandit Motilal Nehru comes towards the tail end. Until very recently, there were certain other surnames which had greater glory in the Kashmiri scale of values. "Nath" recurs most frequently. Raja Dina Nath was the notable Diwan of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The first Indian Judge of the Calcutta High Court was Pandit Shambu Nath of Kashmir.

Almost a 100-per cent literate community, Kashmiri Pandits have many "firsts". The first Indian Judge of the Punjab Chief Court was Pandit Ram Narain Dar—another "nickname" which occurs most frequently in the roster of Kashmiris who have done well "down below". The Kunzrus and the Saprus have become the part of the history of what is now known as Uttar Pradesh. Then there are the Haksars and Kauls (the Nehrus were originally Kauls), the Attals and the Katjus, the Jutshis and the Rainas.

The former rulers of the "Native" States had some strange fascination for Kashmiri Pandits. At one

time or another, a Kashmiri Pandit has been the Diwan of practically every Indian State—Hyderabad (Sukh), Patiala, Jodhpur (Kak), Gwalior, Udaipur, Jaipur (Atal). A contemptuous saying observes that the Pandits of Srinagar get their living by—

"Nalam, Kalam, ya Halam,"
(Lying, writing, or begging).

Thus Kashmiri Pandits have all the qualifications for statecraft as prescribed by Chanakya in his *Arthashastra*. Most of them have always lived upon governmental employments. They are intelligent, with fabulous court manners, and as companions they are amusing and charming. The gift of gab is their trademark.

India has been intoxicated with the Nehrus for quite some time and so it is quite natural that the role of the Kashmiri Pandits in Indian polity should become slightly exaggerated in the popular belief. Bengal, Bombay, Madras, Maharashtra, etc. are chock-full of fabulous clans and families and 'houses' and names. But, for their small numbers the Kashmiri Pandits have supplied a large list of notables—like the Brahmos of Bengal, the Nagars of Gujarat and the Brahmins of Madras.

CLASSICAL SANSKRITISTS

Kashmir has been one of the more important centres of ancient Hindu learning. Legend has it that it was Kashyapa Muni who drained out

water from the Sitsar lake and brought Brahmins to live in the reclaimed land. Perhaps the world's first great engineer if the legend is to be believed, Kashyapa stamped this paradise with his name—Kashyapamar which corrupted into Kashmir. Pantanjali the grammarian and the medicine-man was Kashmiri. Vagbhatta also wrote books on medicine. Charaka wrote a book on medicine—ancient Kashmiri scholars seem to have specialized in grammar and medicine.

Vashu Gupta, who lived about the end of the 8th century of the Christian era, founded the Shaiva philosophy which later attracted Shankara the Great from the southern tip of India to her northern crown. Kalhana wrote the *Rajatarangini* in 1148-49 A.D. and thus gave Kashmir its first recorded history, although the book is a fascinating mixture of history and legend. Zona Raja picked up where Kalhana had left off and brought the *Rajatarangini* up to his own time—1870. Besides being grammarians and medicine-men, the Rishi fathers of modern Pandits were poets to boot—it would be a dead soul which is not inspired to poetry by this unique vale of murmuring brooks and whispering pines.

A Pandit means a scholar, and so he still strives to justify his second-nature. Sahib Kaul wrote on Tantric creed and compiled a dictionary in the 19th century. Parmanand wrote *Krishna Avatar.* At the beginning of the 18th century, Narayan Kaul wrote the history of Kashmir in Persian. Pandit

Dina Nath translated *Bhagwad Gita* in Urdu verse. I am told that the Government of India is spending a goodly amount on scholars who are coining Indian equivalents of military orders and ranks. In the library at Jammu there is a volume compiled by Kashmiri Pandits which gives Sanskrit words for military orders and army ranks.

WHY ALL BRAHMINS?

Practically all Hindus of the Kashmir valley are Brahmins and are called Pandits. This is a strange sociological phenomenon worth a doctor's thesis. Perhaps there is no town or city in India, let alone one half of a State, whose entire Hindu population belongs just to one caste—either Brahmins, Vaishyas, Khshatriyas or Shudras. Any given Hindu community is a conglomeration of castes because the division of functions on which the caste system is partly based makes it imperative. Yet here in the heavenly valley all the Hindus belong to one caste, and to the highest caste at that.

Why? How? I asked the question to several authorities and received numerous answers. The Aryans, one theory goes, first came to Kashmir before they spread out on the Gangetic plains and imbibed the Dravidian structure of castes. The great valley ringed by mighty mountains isolated those who stayed back, and they remained just one social group. There are other embellishments. Agriculture was not possible in those primitive days on hilly and rocky tracts. In fact, no special

economic activity was possible. Only those Aryans who had a spiritual bent of mind and were given to meditation remained back. Fresh inflow was difficult, if not impossible, because the oval valley is sealed on all sides. Moreover, gradually the valleymen began to keep outsiders out; until relatively recently, even Hindus from the plains were stopped at the passes where constantly stood strong guards. The result was that the valley became the abode of hermits, philosophers and saints whose humanitarianism became the basis of tolerance which in turn became the basis of secularism—Kashmir's priceless gift to India.

Yuvaraj Karan Singh gave me yet another theory. The waves of conversions took a heavy toll until those with the strongest resistance and faith—naturally Brahmins—could survive as Hindus. They in turn attracted reinforcement from Brahmins of the plains. He was sad, however, that the Kashmiri Pandit of today is not the scholar of yore. "It is painful to listen to his atrocious Sanskrit pronounciations (Uchharam)", he added wistfully.

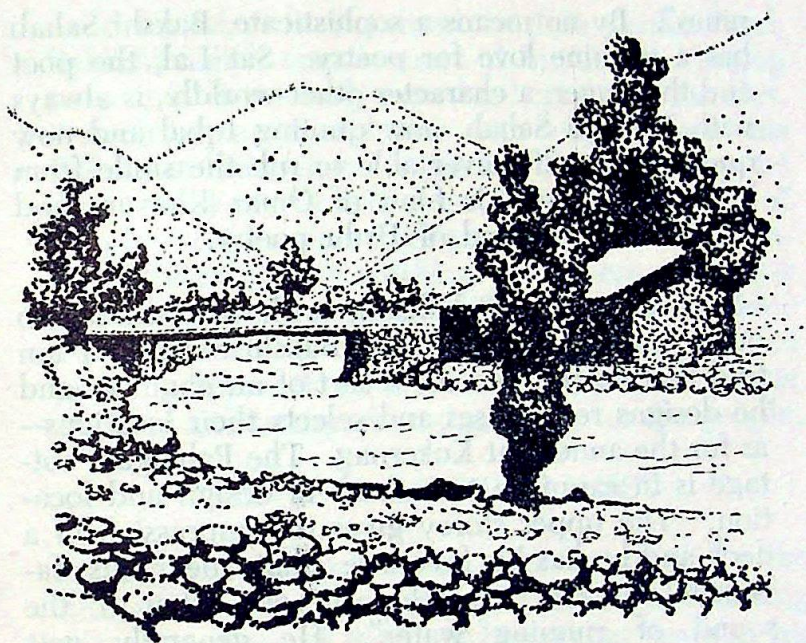
6. THE UNCUT DIAMOND

Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, Prime Minister of the State of Jammu and Kashmir since August 1953, is a mountain-man. He looks the part. Carggy and solid like one of the foot-hills of the Pir Panjal, he blends with the natural scenary of the fabulous valley. Dark for a Kashmiri—he is wheat-coloured, not pale—, he has the physique of a wrestler and the vocal cords of a Ladakh trumpeter. At mid-century his face is as seam-less as the face of the eternal snow winking at the valley from all sides.

Bakshi the mountaineer should be judged by the logic of mountains and valleys. The yardstick of the Gangetic plains can be too refined and perhaps too small to measure an uneven terrain. From Bombay's standards, Bakshi Sahab might be considered loud, but he has to be loud in order to be heard in the valley and to inspire echoes from the mountains which rim the oval cup. The plainsmen would think that he throws his weight around the way he walks, but that is the walk of a mountain-man—unhurried, sure of foot, confident. The way he talks would make the plainsman think that Bakshi is abrupt and edgy like an uncut diamond, but polished gems lose their lustre amidst so much snow. Whatever the requirements of the politicians of the plains, Bakshi is what Kashmir calls for.

THE SEVENTH BRIDGE

Bakshi Sahab does not hesitate to confess that he is the son of "a road worker". In fact he takes an American's pride in describing his log-cabin origin. From poverty to the Prime Ministership of the world's most beautiful State is his social ladder. Because of the humble situation of his family, he could not go beyond the matriculation examination. To earn a livelihood, he became a teacher in Ladakh—a lonely and cold place even for a man from the cold Kashmir Valley.

He was born in the heart of Srinagar city, perhaps near the sixth or the seventh bridge—a birthmark which has helped him a good deal in his political career. Since the birth of the Democratic National Conference, Srinagar's internal power politics can some times take the battle array of the Seventh Bridge versus the Shankaracharya Hill. Near the Seventh Bridge live the teeming masses. On the Shankaracharya Hill are the Palace Hotel and the Yuvaraj's palace and the bungalow of G. M. Sadiq—Bakhshi's latter day rival. Bakshi Sahab can play up his Seventh Bridge and be sarcastic about the Shankaracharya Hill "intellectuals, so-called". Indeed now he himself occupies his official residence near Nedou's, a hotel owned by Sheikh Abdullah's in-laws; but some of his relatives still stick to the Seventh Bridge.

A Scene from Pahalgam

THE PAHALGAM HIDEOUT

I asked Bakshi Sahab what was his most favourite place in Kashmir? Gulmarg? Kokernagh? Sonmarg? It turned out to be Pahalgam. As it happened, we were sitting in his Pahalgam cottage built on the edge of a foaming brook. "I like the sound of running water", he observed, half to himself, adding, "when I listen to it, I forget about who is doing what." Then he looked across the narrow valley towards the pines that cling to the hillside just as wool clings to a sheep, "It is rather rustic here, and I like to hear the wind through the

pines". By no means a sophisticate, Bakshi Sahab has a genuine love for poetry. Sat Lal, the poet and the singer, a character other-worldly, is always with Bakhshi Sahab, now quoting Iqbal and now quoting himself, never able to rub the smile from his face. Bakshi is fond of Omar Khayam and Ghalib. He is fond of Urdu poetry.

The cottage at Pahalgam, with its bark-laiden outer walls, is designed by Bakshi Sahab. I am told that he has become a sort of an engineer and he designs rest-houses and selects their locations—as for the annexe at Kokernag. The Pahalgam cottage is in exquisite taste both in design and location. The upper storey gives the impression of a deck and he has his favourite chair near his favourite window from where he can listen to "the sound of running water". He generally gets up at five in the morning, goes through files when no one is around, not even his private secretary. He believes in speed. He believes in quick decisions, right or wrong. With Chiang Kai-shek he holds that the only failure in life is the failure to act. Then he reads five Delhi newspapers "from cover to cover". He has the nose for news; he knows what is news and how and when to make it.

It is an open secret that Sardar Patel always liked Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad better than Sheikh Abdullah. I found Bakhshi Sahab telling many loving anecdotes of Sardar. The two men had a lot in common—hard like diamonds, rough like un-

cut diamonds, wise but unsubtle. Like Sardar Patel, Bakhshi Sahab spends most of his day in seeing people; after the early morning hours with the files, it is always an open house with him. Even at his Pahalgam hideout, he is not left alone; perhaps he does not like to be left alone. He sees all sorts of people—visitors from foreign countries, Government officials, party workers, petitioners. Srinagar journalists assure me that they can see him any time without difficulty, and talk to him directly on the phone. When there are meetings, he looks after the food and transport arrangements for the people.

FOR AND OF THE MASSES

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru says that he is for the masses but not of the masses; he is fond of recalling the generations of Brahmin blood that flows in his veins. Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad is for the masses as well as of the masses. He was born in a situation shared by millions of his felllow Kashmiris. Even at the pinnacle of the State's pyramid, he retains the manners of the mass-man. It is not a new role; it is not a role at all. Even while Sheikh Abdullah was riding high and Bakhshi was the Deputy Prime Minister, mass-contact was the latter's job. As Prime Minister he made mass-contact his full time job, because he knows that the emotional integration of the insular folks of the valley with the people of the plains is yet to be consummated; although it is a-coming slowly but surely.

Recently, I drove with him from Srinagar to Pahalgam. No A. D. C., no security man, was taken along; there was only the driver. There were no jeep escorts. And all this within a fortnight of the re-arrest of Sheikh Abdullah when the outside world was expecting heavens to fall. At a crossing, five people in tatters stopped the car; I thought: "Here it comes!" Bakshi Sahab sprang outside, affectionately tapped a fellow on the back, greeted another by his first name. The band turned out to be a group of petitioners. He glanced at the pieces of papers, selected one which implored financial aid for a son going to school, sanctioned a hundred rupees on the spot, and put the rest of the applications in his pocket with a promise of needful action. This I witnessed again and again. In every village and at each gathering of people, he knew and greeted several individuals by their first names.

Such personal relations between the ruler and the ruled thrill the masses; people miss this "personal touch" until relations are institutionalized. Even the highly stylized democratic structure in America requires politicians to go around kissing the babies at election times. For a people who have recently emerged from the paternal rule of a Maharajah, this pattern of relationship is all meat and vegetables. I have travelled with many politicians of India who have sprung from the masses and who retain the magic touch of mass-contact even after acquiring crowns of power and authority. But Bakshi Sahab is a phenomenon in his respect, surpassing any one I have known in the plains of

India. He has scorned police protection and escorts while in Delhi, and this has disconcerted many a Central Minister who would not think of moving out without a jeep-full of security men and a car-full of chaprasis. The amazing thing is that no one would think of killing such a Central Minister while Bakshi Sahab is still a controversial figure.

There was a meeting to honour the memory of Habba Khatun, the famous Kashmiri poetess of patriotism, in a village 20 miles from Srinagar. Bakhshi Sahab had taken along a group of distinguished guests headed by Mrs. Vijayalakhmi Pandit. He left the dais and the guests, squatted with the celebrants, and clapped his hands to the tune of the folk songs. He kept a "mike" near him, through which he gave a running commentary. He cracked jokes and the villagers laughed. He returned to his distinguished guests, took some biscuits from their plates, and threw them at the people. The common folks enjoyed this side-play. He directed a "Bachha" dancer (a dancing boy dressed like a girl, a legacy of the Afghan rule) to be more vigorous because one of his guests was a noted classical dancer. Mrs. Pandit took the opportunity to slip away lest she was called by Bakhshi Sahab to perform something. He is in the habit of not only performing himself but also of making his guests perform. He wants all to be one and have a jolly good time. Later he told the entire story of poet Habba Khatun to the people in Kashmiri. He recited several of her songs and poems.

Like Pandit Nehru, he is intoxicated by the crowd. He comes into his real elements when surrounded by common folk. He is fond of creating chaos to begin with so that he can restore order in the end. There might be, for instance, a big, well-behaved crowd waiting to hear him. He would make a sign for people to come nearer to him. Cordons would be broken, followed by confusion. Then he would leave his 'mike', grab a youngster by his coat-collar (all with affection), push him back. He would go around making people sit down. He is more like President Soekarno of Indonesia than like Pandit Nehru in this respect; for, he is almost a band-leader. He leads people in laughter and cheers, tears and denunciations.

THE BAKSHI BROOD

The Bakhshi family is one of the biggest broods in Srinagar. A family gathering often takes the form of a public meeting. The joint-family system prevails, and decisions are taken on the paternalistic basis. They are five brothers; some of them do business. Then there are the numerous off-springs. There are ten graduates in the family but none of them in the employ of the Kashmir Government. He has one son, who is trained in Germany and married to a German girl. He has one daughter whose husband is in the Indian Administrative Service.

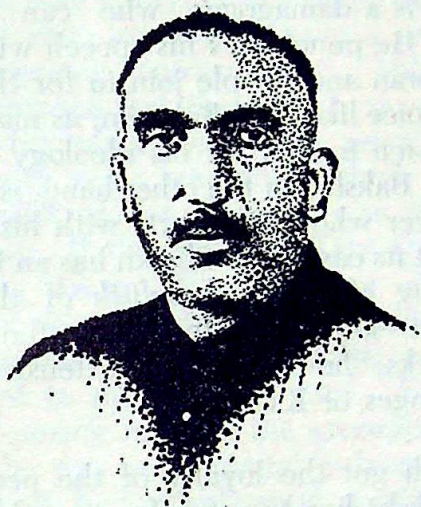
He was born on July 20th, 1907. As a youngster he was an athlete, excelling in swimming and run-

ning and mountain-climbing. He was good at sports. He played football and hockey with distinction until an accident fractured his ankle. It was while he was a teacher that he came under the spell of Mahatma Gandhi. He gave up teaching and took a job with the Srinagar branch of the All-India Spinners' Association. He joined the Muslim Conference as soon as it was founded, in 1931, that is. His organizational talents first found their expression in students' and workers' unions. He was imprisoned for a year and a half in 1936 for organizing a students' strike. During 1933-34 he resisted the Dogra repression and earned the title of Salar-i-Azam, or the Commander-in-Chief. Vallabhbhai Patel, an older man, had earned the title of "Sardar" a few years earlier.

In 1938 he went underground and baffled the police. It was he who organized a network of local committees throughout the State when the Muslim Conference was turned into the secular National Conference. During the "Quit Kashmir Movement" of 1946-47, patterned after Gandhiji's "Quit India Movement" of earlier years, he operated from what was then British India. When the first popular government was formed in the State in 1948, he became the Deputy Prime Minister under Sheikh Abdullah. After the Sheikh's arrest in August 1953, he became the Prime Minister as well as the President of the All-Jammu and Kashmir National Conference, the ruling party.

As the Prime Minister, he carries out an old Mughal custom. Certain days are set apart on which any one can approach him any time and

launch a complaint. His associates are on hand in case any of them is the object of criticism and complaint. He is firm as well as kind, as man of strong loyalties. On one point he is unwavering—secularism of the State. That is why Kashmir's accession to India is "irrevocable" to him, come what may. He would give no quarter to communalists, and no mercy to conspirators. During the devastating floods of 1957, he gave a further evidence of his physical courage; he walked for miles knee-deep in water, with sacks of rice on his shoulders, but finally reached Srinagar to be with his people.

It is not without a trace of regret and nostalgia that he even now talks of old colleagues like G.M. Sadiq. To all their charges of corruption and maladministration and slowed-down Indianization, Bakhshi has a simple answer. They must answer the charges themselves as they were in the Government until yesterday. Stung as he is by the personal attacks of the leaders of the Democratic National Conference, he does not believe in sending them to the point of no return. I observed a characteristic episode in Srinagar. The Union Railway Minister. Shri Jagjiwan Ram, was being given a tea party by Bakhshi Sahab. It was a large group, and the Ministers and visiting Ambassadors from Delhi were sitting on tables near the Union Railway Minister on a raised platform. Mr. Sadiq was lost at one of the tables down below. Bakhshi went up to him, dragged him to the platform, and seated him next to the guest of honour, while he himself wandered about doing his usual job of mass-contact.

Bakshi

NOT A SHEIKH

The curse of Dinna is on him. He could never escape a comparison with Sheikh Abdullah, his erstwhile leader, his erstwhile Prime Minister, and his present prisoner. Visitors to the valley make mental comparisons; people of the State make silent comparisons; colleagues who have served under both make fleeting comparisons; even he, I suspect, makes occasional comparisons. Bakhshi is tall, but the Sheikh is even taller, physically. Bakhshi likes Omar Khayam and is the valley's native plant; the Sheikh prefers Iqbal (who coined the word "Pakistan") and is the product of Punjab politics.

The Sheikh is a damagogue who can sway his audiences. He punctuates his speech with recitals from the Koran and people join in for the refrain. He is The Voice like Paul Robeson; as many people throng to listen to him for his ideology as for his vocal cords. Bakshi, on the other hand, is a matter-of-fact speaker who back-charts with his audience and puts it at its ease. The Sheikh has an instinctive understanding of the *real politik* of the world; but Bakhshi knows better how the average Kashmiri ticks; he has hiked extensively in the mountain ranges of Kashmir.

The Sheikh got the loyalty of the people as if by right; Bakshi has to work for it and he works hard. The Sheikh is aloof, imperious; even his Cabinet colleagues were afraid to approach him. Bakshi is a back-slapper like an American Rotarian. Sheikh is a dreamer who perhaps pictures Kashmir as his personal Sheikhdom; Bakshi is a plodder who knows that these are the days of democracy and that in the end only service will count with the people. The Sheikh has the foolhardiness of an egotist; Bakshi has the shrewdness of the realist. The Sheikh is orthodox and intolerant; Bakshi is liberal and catholic. The Sheikh sulks; Bakshi smiles. Gay in private life, the Sheikh is humourless and puritan in public; gay with the public, Bakshi is sedate in private life. It was the subjective approach of an over-confident man which tripped the Sheikh; it was the objective approach of a cautious man which steadied Bakshi. The tall man got too big for his boots;

the athletic man always remembered the days when it was not easy for him to have a pair of boots. But the supreme contrast is this. While the subjective approach led the Sheikh to waver in his loyalties, the objective Bakshi remains steadfast in his loyalty to his grass-roots which are as green on the banks of the Jhelum as on the banks of the Ganges. If the Sheikh is Don Quixot, Bakshi the Sancho Panza. It was an act of courage on Bakshi Sahab's part to release Sheikh Abdullah; sure as he was of the mood of the people, it was still a shot in the dark for him. Had Abdullah come out oozing love for the accession!—an accession that he was instrumental in forging! The denouement of that problematic possibility will always remain a subject of conjecture and a subject rating high drama. Meanwhile, the people of the valley have a Prime Minister who thinks more of their welfare and less of his personal glory.

MAULANA'S MANTLE

After Bakshi, who? It is a less acute question than "After Nehru, what?". For one thing, Bakshi Sahab is only slightly over fifty and a human dynamo. He is the last to leave a meeting or a mushaira; younger people are worn out before he is. But what is a question-mark for India as a whole is a question-mark for Kashmir also, although on a smaller scale and in less pressing a manner. It is true that no person is still within sight who can step in Bakshi's shoes; Sadiq is in the opposition and as yet without a sizeable party,

while Bakshi Abdul Rashid, Secretary of the National Conference, has still a long way to go. It should be remembered, however, that trees become tall much faster in the valley than on the plains of India.

One would wish, however, that Bakshi Sahab were not so indispensable to Kashmir as he is. Required as he is in Kashmir, to my way of thinking he is more required in Delhi. He would strengthen the Nehru Cabinet. Since the death of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the Muslims of India need a focus and a symbol; only Bakshi Sahab seems to be made to order. As it is, he is the only Muslim Chief Minister of a State—a fact that we are apt to forget. He has the stature, the personality and record of service to fill the psychological void left behind by Maulana Azad. I know that there are technical difficulties, not all of them created by the people of the plains, but it seems altogether desirable that Bakhshi Sahab becomes a member of the Congress Working Committee and of the Parliamentary Board. It would be good for India and salutary for Kashmir. Historic forces have conspired to demand a dual role for him—in Kashmir and in the rest of India—and to a large extent the fulfilment lies in Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad's own hands. Kashmir should spare this one smile for India; it has so many.